DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 877 PS 015 690

AUTHOR Arnold, Genevieve Hunter
TITLE An Interpretive Analysis of Teacher Expectations in Early Childhood Education.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Classroom Environment; *Curriculum Development; *Early Childhood Education; Grade 1; Kindergarten; *Stereotypes; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *Teacher Expectations

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to broaden the existing field of teacher expectation research by answering the following questions about teacher expectations: (1) How do teachers in early childhood education develop expectations for student success and failure within the classroom social system? (2) What are the stereotypes of the "good" and "bad" student? (3) How are these expectations and stereotypes reflected in the daily life of young children? and (4) How do teacher expectations for the model or ideal student affect the development and implementation of the basic curriculum? Investigators observed the phenomenon of teacher expectations in kindergarten and first grade classes, interviewed teachers, and conducted group interviews with the students. They concluded that (1) the formation and maintenance of teacher expectations were influenced significantly by (a) personal and past history of teachers and students, (b) traditional role descriptions of teachers, students, and the curriculum, and (c) society and individual needs; (2) the stereotypes of the "good" and "bad" student were strongly related to teacher expectations for the model student; (3) teacher expectations strongly influenced the daily activities of young children in the classroom; and (4) the teacher's ideal student profile and the curriculum influenced and shaped each other. Recommendations include directions for future research and the identification of a personal conceptual framework for curriculum development. Appendices include methodology and questions used in teacher and student interviews. (DST)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED266877

ARNOLD, GENEVIEVE HUNTER, Ed.D. An Interpretive Analysis of Teacher Expectations in Early Childhood Education.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Genevieve H. Arnold

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 015690

The purpose of this study was to broaden the existing field of teacher expectation research by examining the following dimensions of the teacher expectation phenomenon: (a) How do teachers in early childhood education develop their expectations for student success and failure within the classroom social system? (b) How are the stereotypes of the "good" and "bad" student related to teacher expectations of the "model" or "ideal" student? (c) How are these expectations and stereotypes reflected in the daily life of young children? (d) How do teacher expectations for the model or ideal student affect the development and implementation of the basic curriculum?

The investigation was conducted by observing the phenomenon of teacher expectations in the naturalistic setting of two kindergarten and two first grade classes, through interviewing the four participant teachers and conducting group interviews with the students in each of the four classes. Four students from each of the four classes, who had been previously identified by their teachers as being either "good" or "bad" students, were interviewed individually. Data gathered from the interviews and observations were examined phenomenologically to reveal how students and teachers understand teacher expectations. Identified

perceptions and understandings of teachers and students were interpreted personally and theoretically to address the proposed research questions.

Conclusions drawn from the study are summarized as follows: (a) The formation and maintenance of teacher expectations were influenced significantly by four major forces: personal and past history of teachers and students; traditional role descriptions of teachers, students and the curriculum; society's needs and individual needs. (b) The stereotypes of the "good" and "bad" student were found to be strongly related to teacher expectations for the model or ideal student. (c) Teacher expectations were observed to have a strong influence on the daily activities of young children in the early education classroom. (d) The teacher's ideal student profile and the curriculum influenced and shaped each other in a circular, interactive process.

Recommendations based on this study include: (a) directions for future research (i.e., follow-up studies on teacher perceptions of the ideal student at different age levels, analyses of the ideal student profile as it relates to success and failure in the classroom, comparisons of these findings with private alternative school settings); (b) the identification of a personal conceptual framework for curriculum development.

An Interpretive Analysis of Teacher
Expectations in Early Childhood Education. (1985)

The purpose of this study was to broaden the existing field of research related to teacher expectations by gaining additional insight into the relationship between teacher expectations for the ideal student and the development and maintenance of the early childhool curriculum. This complex relationship was investigated by engaging in three distinct but highly integrated activities. The first involved observing the phenomenon of teacher expectations in the naturalistic settings of kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Secondly, teacher's perceptions and understandings of this phenomenon were explored by participating in direct dialogue with the early childhood teachers. Finally, the students' understanding of the teacher's role and her expectations was examined in group and individual interviews. The perceptions and understandings contained in a descriptive review of the data were interpreted personally and theoretically. These interpretations were used to address basic research questions which had been identified to guide and direct the study.

These interpretations were also germane to theoretical commonalities and posited basic assumptions outlined in the beginning of the study. The major findings will be outlined as they relate to these two areas of interest.

Learning theories cited from the previous research efforts of Bloom, Piaget, Hunt, and others shared three basic commonalities:

1. All children develop and progress through similar stages and require an environmental and experiential match to ensure maximum growth.
2. Educators should capitalize on periods of rapid growth due to the child's increased sensitivity to learning.
3. Cognitive and intellectual development comprised of inquiring and problem solving should be the focus of early childhood education.

The findings of this study documented that teachers were aware of and utilized specific elements contained in these learning theories. For example, their interview responses and certain classroom activities reflected a workable eagerness and sensitivity to learning. The teachers commented on how eager, enthusiastic, and curious children were when they first entered the school environment and how this enthusiasm appeared to diminish as the child progressed through school. These developmental characteristics were stated as being the primary reason the four teachers were involved in early childhood education. As I observed and listened to teachers and students, I discovered that there were few activities where students were involved in problem solving or inquiry.

The majority of the children's instructional experiences were devoted to competency-based, performance objectives grounded in the acquisition of basic skills. There did not seem to be conscious effort made to achieve a match. between developmental readiness and experiential activities. Instead, a standard set of skills was presented to all the children. Even though they were allowed to progress at different rates the learning activities were not personalized for each student's development readiness.

Another research effort germane to these findings was Ray Rist's hypothesis that a teacher's normative reference group became the basis for the teacher's expectations for the "ideal" student (Rist, 1970). In this study four influences were identified as contributing to the formation and maintenance of teacher expectations. They included the following; (a) an ongoing, interactive process which exists between individuals (teachers and students) and society (institution of school); (b) the personal and past history of teachers and students; (c) traditional aspects of schooling (i.e., teacher roles, student roles, ideal student types, perceptions of curriculum;)and(d) society's need to transmit cultural knowledge and the individual's (teachers and students)need for selfhood. In light of the identification of these four influences, I concluded that teachers' personal values and beliefs were not the single basis for the teacher's development of the ideal student type.

As a part of my initial research design I developed basic assumptions to provide a foundation for this investigation. Relevant findings generated from this study will be discussed as they relate to these four basic assumptions.

1. Success and failure in the early childhood classroom seem to be related to the teacher's expectations for the ideal or model student.

The four teachers in this study described their personal profile of the ideal student. I observed that if a child possessed these valued characteristics there was a high probability for success. However, a severe deficit or lack of these essential characteristics often caused the child to be identified as being a "bad" student which was an indication that failure was a strong possibility.

2. An insight into the phenomenon of these teacher expectations could provide a better understanding of "what is" within the early education classroom.

By examining the formation and maintenance of teacher expectations and their relationship to the daily classroom life of children, I obtained an increased understanding of the present state of the art in early childhood education. I noted

that teacher expectations had a significant influence on the student's perceptions of themselves and the implementation of the curriculum. Moreover, the interaction between two seemingly opposing forces (i.e., societal-institutional and individual-personal needs) was observed in a variety of ways within the learning environment (e.g., a prevalent subject matter orientation versus a stated desire for a more child-centered curriculum). Often the teachers seemed to be caught between these opposing influences which forced them to match and balance creatively these influences to achieve a personal educational equilibrium. Two of the participant teachers felt comfortable with their match and balance. The others were still struggling to develop a similar comfortable position. The students also experienced the influence of these two forces by having to conform to the teacher's and institution's values as well as maintain a sense of selfhood.

3. Teacher expectations of the ideal or model student as well as the stereotypes of "good" and "bad" students are all humanly constructed and socially created.

These findings supported this basic assumption in that each teacher personally constructed her individual profile of a "good" or ideal student. One teacher, Mrs. Parker, stated in her interview that "good" students became molded to my goals." Therefore, her goals determined the definition of a "good" student. When I asked her if the "good" and "bad" student existed only in her expectations, she responded, "Yes, realistically that's the way it is." I also observed the social creation of the stereotypes ("ideal,"good" students) by the school in that they were a reflection of traditional institutional values.

4. These teacher expectations can be studied in depth by observing actual practice, having dialogue with teachers and students, and using personal history.

The description of the interviews and observations contained in the study provided a rich source of information concerning teacher expectations. An in-depth analysis of this valuable information generated findings which were then used to address the basic research questions summarized as follows:

1. The formation and maintenance of teacher expectations were influenced significantly by four major forces: Personal and past history of teachers and students; traditional role descriptions of teachers, students, and the curriculum; society's needs, and individual needs.
2. The stereotypes of the "good" and "bad" student were found to be strongly related to teacher expectations for the model or ideal student.
3. Observations of the four classrooms documented the strong influence of teacher expectations in the daily life of young children in the early childhood classroom.
4. The development and implementation of the basic curriculum influenced and was influenced by teacher expectations for the ideal student. It was found to be a circular, interactive process where each influenced and shaped the other.

Recommendations

The information, insights, and understandings derived from this study provided a foundation on which to develop recommendations for future educational endeavors. These recommendations will consist of possible future research directions and the identification of a personal conceptual framework for curriculum development.

Recommendations for possible future research efforts include the following:

1. Follow-up studies examining the teacher's ideal student profile and its influence on the curriculum. One possibility is to conduct a longitudinal study which would include K-3 and explore teachers' perceptions of the ideal student at different age and grade levels.
2. Conduct additional intensive analyses of the ideal student profile and its relationship to success and failure in the classroom.
3. Compare the ideal student profile generated from this study with those derived from similar interviews and observations in private alternative school settings which have different articulated ideological frameworks (e.g., Montessori, British Infant Schools, and religious academies).

The second major recommendation I would make is that teachers identify for themselves a personal conceptual framework for curriculum development. Such a framework might follow a pattern similar to the one which I have constructed for myself which is grounded in the belief that there is a proper match and balance between individuals (teachers, students) and societal needs and interests. In order to develop a curriculum that will provide this critical match and balance, I believe three elements are essential: a curriculum planning model, an educational platform, and an ideological perspective.

Curriculum development must be conceptualized as an ongoing evolutionary

process analogous to a continuous journey or pilgrimage rather than an end product or destination. Just as a physical map is important to a successful journey, a curriculum planning model becomes equally significant in curriculum development. The curriculum planning model that I recommend has no predetermined end product but is process oriented and frees educators to perceive this endeavor as spiral-shaped rather than following a straight predetermined course. This planning model would be all-inclusive and able to accomodate divergent and diffuse ideas.

An educational platform is needed which includes the two viewpoints of "what is" in the area of early childhood education as well as a mental picture of "what could be." The study's review of the literature, analysis of data, and summary comprise my interpretation of "what is". My vision of "what could be" consists of a proposal to strive for a proper match and balance between the needs of individuals (teachers, students) and society.

The ideological perspective which I have chosen to direct and guide this curriculum development process is grounded in liberation, transcendence, and the unleashing of human potential. The adoption of such a perspective could serve as a plumb line or assessment tool to evaluate present and emerging curriculum designs for possible modifications and refinements. Self-assessment would be the natural first step in this evaluation process. Teachers could analyze their expectations for themselves, the institution, and the students in relation to a liberating perspective. Does actual classroom practice (i.e., student success and failure) correspond to the characteristics of transcendence and liberation for teachers and students? If not, educators would determine why this had not occurred and take appropriate action. I believe that the creative use of these three elements, a curriculum planning model, and educational platform, and an ideological perspective could assist individuals (students,

teachers) to recognize and celebrate both their personal uniqueness as well as their connectedness and dependence on each other. When individuals recognize and appreciate these interrelationships they can respond more positively to their own individuality as well as the common good of the group.

A curriculum design based on a proper match and balance between these two dimensions of existence might be analogous to the caucus race in Alice in Wonderland.

> " What is a Caucus-race?" said Alice.
>
> "Why, said the Dodo, " the best way to explain it is to do it." . . . First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, . . . and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no "one, two, three, and away," but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked,so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out, "the race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, "But who has won?" . . . "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes." (Carroll, 1978, pp. 49-50)

Everyone would win and everyone would have a prize.

Appendix A

Teacher Interviews

In-depth interviews with the four participant teachers were conducted in their homes during the summer months. The questions which structured the interview were open-ended and were designed to encourage dialogue. This mode of inquiry was used to gain insight into (a) how their expectations have evolved, (b) how past experience (biography) affected the development of their expectations, (c) how the curriculum has affected their expectations, and (d) how their expectations have shaped curriculum.

Dialogue between the teacher and interviewer was initiated and maintained by using a series of open-ended questions. The questions and responses were recorded on tape for accurate transcription. The first series of questions were based on Pinar and Grumet's (1976) use of autobiography in curriculum development. "Why am I a teacher?" "What can it mean to be a teacher?" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. vii). How are my first educational experiences remembered? What influence did my own early childhood years have on my live?

The remaining questions were designed to reveal each teacher's present state of consciousness about her curricular and behavioral expectations for the educational setting. They sought to peel away layers of "sedimentation" of stored-up meaning to illuminate the process and the kernel of meaning deep within. The interview was not restricted to these questions; however, they shaped the process and provided structure.

1. Why are you a teacher?

2. When did you first become interested in being a teacher?

3. What were your early childhood educational experiences like. Describe them.

4. What can it mean to be a teacher? What is the ideal teacher?

5. What do you expect of yourself as a teacher, and what should parents and students expect of you?

6. What do you expect of your students generally?

7. Can you think of any students in your classroom who you would describe as a " good " student?

8. Describe a "good" student.

9. What makes a "good" student?

10. Does a student's behavior or his academic success determine whether he is a "good" student?

11. What is important to success in your classroom?

12. How would you define school ability in your classroom?

13. Can you think of any students in your classroom who could be described as "bad" students?

14. What makes a student "bad" or unsuccessful in your classroom?

15. How do you explain the phenomenon of "good" and "bad" students? Why do you think we have "good" and "bad" students?

16. Why do you think students are "good" and "bad"?

Appendix B

Students Interviews

In an attempt to discover how students in early childhood perceive and understand the world of school, specifically the role of teachers, the entire class answered questions as a group. These questions were introduced in the context of communicating with a visitor from outer

space concerning specific phenomena in the classroom. The popular extraterrestrial "being", E.T., was used to elicit student responses that would reveal their own unique view of the world. The students were asked to assist E.T. in understanding the experience of schooling by answering specific questions relating to the role of teachers and their expectations.

Following the group interviews, the students were asked to raise their hands if they would be willing to talk with E.T. individually. From this group of volunteers two students were selected who had been identified by the teacher as being good or successful students. Two additional children were chosen who had been previously defined as bad or unsuccessful students. Those chosen and their classmates were unaware of this prearranged selection process. The individual students were interviewed separately using questions that examined their perceptions of "good" and "bad" students.

These questions formed an outline for the discussion of of teachers and students. The responses were recorded using a tape recorder to ensure accuracy of transcription.

Group interview questions

1. What is a teacher?
2. Why do we have teachers?
3. What do teacher like?
4. What makes the teacher happy?
5. How do you please the teacher?
6. What makes teachers smile at you?

Individual student interview questions

1. Have you ever heard the term "good" student?
2. If so, what is a "good" student?
3. How do you get to be a "good" student?
4. Are you a "good" student?
5. How do you know?
6. Have you ever heard the term "bad" student?
7. What is a "bad" student?
8. Have you ever been a "bad" student?
9. Why?
10. How could we help all students to be "good"?

Bibliography

1. Bloom, B.S. (1964). Stability and change in human characteristics. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

2. Bloom, B.S. (1981). All our children learning. New York: McGraw-Hill.

3. Hunt, J. McV. (1961). Intelligence and experience. New York: The Ronald Press.

4. Piaget, J. (1967). Six phychological studies. New York. Random House.

5. Rist, R.C. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. Harvard Educational Review, 40 (3), 411-451.